DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 139 415 IR 004 793

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TITLE Guidelines for Learning Stations.
INSTITUTION Missouri Univ., Columbia.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Style; *Elementary Grades; Guidelines; Instruction; *Instructional Programs; Learning Activities; *Learning Laboratories; Learning Specialists; Professional Continuing Education

ABSTRACT

Guidelines for designing and planning learning stations for pupils at the elementary grade level include suggestions on how to develop a station that will be successful in meeting the learners' needs. Instructions for the use of tapes at a station and matching pupils with stations are given, as are guidelines on classroom arrangement and record keeping. (AP)

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Guidelines for Learning Stations

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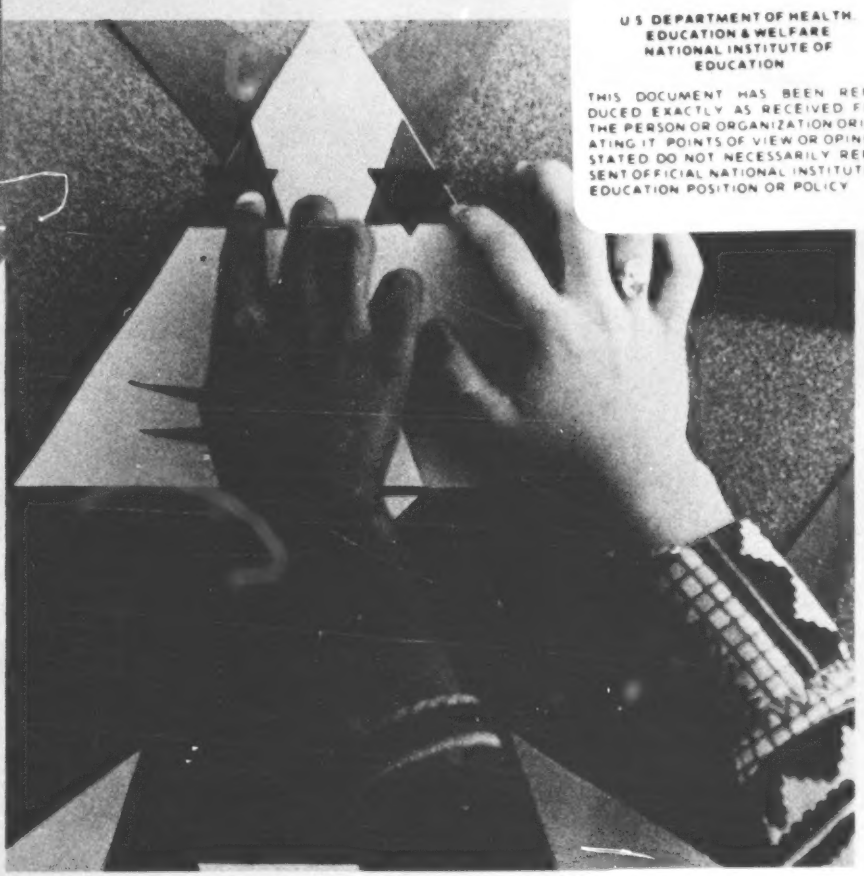

A Continuing Professional Education Monograph

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IR004 793

About the Authors

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Learning stations are much discussed and often written about. Educators are busy designing and planning learning centers for students, believing the centers motivate students and reinforce learning.

Those who believe that students have different learning styles know too that some students do not care for learning stations. Also, much general instruction and learning are through interaction in small and large groups and teacher participation. The teacher is still responsible for the basic instruction, and stations are only a part of the instructional program.

The following information will provide hints for the beginner in building learning stations, for those who have tried a few and desire to refine their technique, and for those who have had unsuccessful experiences.

Keep learning stations simple at first, with only two or three located in a classroom.

The Learning Station

The learning station should:

- be an attractive and inviting place for a child—magnetic.
- set measurable objectives for the child that are stated so each child will understand.
- teach a child through all his/her senses. Reading should not be necessary for primary youngsters.
- assure some measure of success for every child.
- provide activities designed for reinforcement or practice of skills, but can be used to introduce new concepts.
- involve an individual or a small group usually.
- be introduced to the entire group so all have a general idea of what is to be done and learned.
- answer a diagnosed need of a child or a small group of children.
- provide for varied levels of cognition from simple to complex. These levels may be provided in a simple station or in a series of related stations.
- allow teacher and pupil evaluation through criterion-referenced objectives.

Living With Stations

Factors to consider prior to initiating learning stations:

- needs of children.
- individual teacher's prior experience in individualizing instruction.
- freedom granted to teacher by board of education and parents.
- number of activities available for children to use.
- how and where to store activities.
- teacher's preparation and courage.

Positive points for learning stations:

- provide experiences for individual skill mastery.
- present more opportunities for the teacher to work in a small group or on a one-to-one basis with children.
- stimulate the use of known skills in new areas at a higher level of skill development.
- present a situation where the child must assume more responsibility for his own learning.
- provide openness in pupil-teacher

relationships to permit improved responses and interaction.

- provide for immediate feedback at the moment when needed.

Part the children will play in the construction and organization of stations:

- involve the children in determining purposes and values of learning in a station environment.
- involve the children in the initial planning and executing of stations.
- involve the child in evaluating the effectiveness of the station in terms of the objectives.
- allow children to bring materials from home for stations.
- allow older children to prepare own stations for trial and error in the classroom.

To evaluate the children's work:

- the teacher will confer regularly with many of the children.
- the child will check and evaluate much of his/her own work.
- the teacher and older children, after joint evaluation, will plan next steps.
- the child completes a verbal or written evaluation of the learning activities.

Rules or alternatives for beginners:

- Keep the stations simple at first.
- Start with just two or three stations in the classroom.

The floor is a natural place for a station. In this case, the hall allows plenty of space.

Some learning stations will provide opportunities for the child to work individually, with a partner, or as a group member.

- Begin with a series of stations on one skill.
- Establish stations for a curricular area.
- Use all areas in your classroom: music center, library corner, hall, cloakroom, playground, etc.
- Base stations on pupil interests according to the skill to be taught.
- Present station to entire group so students will have a general idea of what to do.
- Consider stations which provide opportunities for the child to do individual work; to work with a partner; to interact as a group member; and to interact with the teacher.
- A good rule of thumb for number of stations is to make two activities for each child included in the program (as a goal).
- Use station identifiers large enough for a child to see: hang from lights; use large numerals on the tables; or number stations consecutively around the room.
- Use coding for stations, such as colors, pictures, etc.

• Watch length of time carefully at the introduction of stations in a classroom. For young children (kindergarten), stations should not exceed five minutes at the beginning. For older children (ages 7-9), 20 minutes is a suggested time allotment.

• Stations should have a short life of one or two weeks.

• Maintain a routine—if you do stations three days a week, attempt to keep that schedule.

• Encourage group station-work under teacher's direction at first.

• Gear station to interest level of children—do not forget the boys.

• Alternate directed learning activity with a free activity.

• Expect confusion at the beginning.

• Make activities as durable as possible: use contact paper; laminate if possible; back games with cardboard for strength; and mask all edges with tape to prevent fraying.

Games and activity materials must be durable. The children can help plan and make them.

Use Of Tapes At Stations

- Teach children how to use recorder—kindergarten children can easily master this.
- Teach children how to use headsets (controlling volume and proper placement of headsets).
- Instruct students to listen to directions from start to finish.
- Keep directions on tape clear and simple.
- Avoid too much manipulation of recorder.
- Be sequential—use phrases like "first," "second," "then," and "after."
- Alternate tape station with game activity station.
- Color code tapes.
- Keep a copy of the script.
- Introduce all students to contents of the tape.

Recorded programs are a valuable tool. The equipment can be easily mastered by young children.

Matching Pupil With Station

Suggestions for identifying the station for pupil (especially for the primary grades):

- numbered cards around neck for child to mark through as he/she progresses through the stations.
- hand-carried numbered station cards.
- shapes given to child to correspond to shapes at stations.
- animal pictures given to children to correspond to pictures at stations.

Corresponding shapes or pictures instantly identify the learning station.

- names of children written above or inside station activity.
- necklaces with beads to correspond to stations attended.
- colors to correspond to colors at stations.
- bracelets numbered or with beads to correspond to station.
- unit activities to correspond to station activities such as community helpers being station identifiers.
- alphabet letters to correspond to letters at stations using large, small, etc.
- library cards placed in pockets on the back of the piano or other large piece of furniture. These pockets can be used as holders for station identifiers.

Classroom Arrangement

The teacher's creativity sets the pace for each individual room. Some ideas for arrangement include:

- informal arrangement of furniture varies with the arrangement of the learning stations.
- tables can be used quite efficiently for group stations.
- partitioned-off places, large boxes, or cubbyholes can be used.
- the floor is an ideal place for stations.
- pillows and rugs help—even the aesthetic quality.
- bean bag chairs for reading corners and mattresses are good.

Cloakrooms make ideal locations for individual or partner stations.

Making Stations Functional

The day may be divided into designated blocks of time—for example, 30 minutes devoted to mathematics when the children work in stations. Consider these alternatives:

- Some teachers prefer to have children mix mathematics and language stations during the same period.
- All children work in stations in the same

subject area (a number of these stations would be required). Other stations may be optional for extension or enrichment of the skill.

- Some teachers will introduce stations in one subject area the first half of the year and then introduce a second subject area during the last half of the year.

When a child completes the required stations in a subject area, he/she may work in stations in other content areas.

In a more flexible situation the children may make choices and work in required or interest locations throughout the day.

Initial training in working at stations should extend over six to eight days for younger children.

The Teacher

While the children are working in stations, the teacher:

- holds individual and/or small group conferences to discuss with the child or children strengths and weaknesses.
- works with small instructional groups.
- observes the children while they work in the stations to determine weaknesses and strengths and to evaluate the effectiveness of the station.

Teacher-student conferences add meaning to the learning process of the stations.

Record Keeping

Record-keeping is an integral part of station planning, development and management. There are many ways of recording the completion of an activity, and each teacher should be encouraged to develop his/her own system. A plan should be developed so that it is meaningful to both children and teacher. The complexity of the plan will depend upon the maturity of the children involved.

Records provide data for:

- the child's self-evaluation, diagnosis, and maintenance of records.
- the teacher's evaluation and diagnosis.
- determining the next step for learning.
- discussing with parents the child's mastery of basic skills, and the record.

Five types of records have been found helpful:

- personal record kept by the child for himself/herself, the teacher, and parents.
- teacher's record of the various samples of the student's work.
- station record posted at each station on which the child signs after successful completion.
- station availability record in which teachers keep copies of formats for all stations and the progress of each child.
- card punched record to be maintained by the child.

If a child is too young to maintain a file of daily achievements, he/she should be allowed to verbalize either with the teacher or an aide concerning his/her work at the stations.

A Quiz For You

As you design and select learning stations, it is helpful to have a certain philosophy for them. Read through the following statements and write "yes" in the blank preceding the statement if you agree with the statement. Write "no" in the blank preceding the statement if you do not agree.

As you design the learning station, remember that each child:

_____ should be provided the environment and opportunity to develop to his/her capacity.

_____ has a unique potential for learning and should be allowed to do so without undue stress or strain.

_____ has developed several different modes of learning and should develop others.

_____ should have the opportunity to pick and choose his/her learning stations (even make a bad choice) as a part of learning to assume responsibility and make decisions.

_____ needs performance criteria—knows when he/she has finished.

_____ needs to be placed according to his/her abilities.

_____ has the opportunity to self-check his/her work most of the time, but the teacher should request that the child interact occasionally.

_____ needs a variety of media to facilitate his/her work.

_____ learns best when he/she is *actively* involved.

_____ needs meaningful and realistic tasks that are obtainable yet challenging.

_____ should have opportunities through which he/she can develop and improve his/her self-image.

As the learning stations are designed, each teacher:

_____ should recognize that clear and measurable objectives assist the child to learn the purpose of learning.

_____ should realize there is no best way to use learning stations in a classroom—but should develop a method that works best in his/her particular classroom situation within the philosophy of the school.

_____ should realize that learning station teaching is time-consuming at first—when designing the first ones—but they become easier after you work out a procedure.

_____ should realize that his/her classroom is likely to become less tidy using the learning station technique unless they are designed to be compact.

_____ should provide curriculum-based open-ended activities so each child can reach his/her own level.

_____ should recognize that students who are self-motivated learn more than teacher-dominated ones.

_____ should provide opportunities through which

the child can learn to assume responsibilities for his/her own learning.

_____ should understand that immediate reinforcement must follow feedback.

_____ should provide opportunities for the child to learn through assuming different roles . . . partner, leader, and follower.

_____ should make himself/herself available to the students at various stages of learning activities.

_____ should prepare effective learning stations in terms of the needs of the child.

If you have twenty-two "yes" answers, full speed ahead! Have fun and assist children in one style of learning. However, be cautious that you don't become too enthusiastic and attempt to make a twenty-six hour day out of twenty-four.•

Role-playing is another opportunity learning stations provide.

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